

by Arthur E. DuBois

AMONG THE QUARTERLIES

THIS QUESTION OF "REGIONALISM"

THE more one thinks of American quarterlies as an isolated phenomenon in journalism, the more bewildering they become. They are bewildering for their numbers and variety. They range all the way from the *American Journal of Astrology* through the *Mark Twain Quarterly* to the fly-by-night "little" magazines of a hundred-and-one varieties commonly featuring story or poetry.

The specialist seems best served by the quarterly. The literary historian, for example, has *ELH*, *Modern Philology*, *Philological Quarterly*, *PMLA*, *Studies in Philology*; and these quarterlies in this particular field are supplemented by *M. L. N.* and by other quarterlies still more specialized: *American Literature*, *Speculum*, or *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, the last inaugurated in March of this year. A conservative estimate would place the number of quarterlies devoted to history at between sixty and a hundred¹; and of course these are supplemented by quarterlies devoted to economics, political science, sociology, history of law, of philosophy, and so on.

In fact, quarterlies are so numerous that it would be impractical to try to make even a bibliography of them. Since they come out irregularly often, and are not issued through ordinary agencies commonly, it is impossible to keep well-informed of even the best of them in any single community at any particular time—the normal income of most libraries could be exhausted on quarterly subscriptions alone. But the numerousness and variety of the specializing quarterly, even more than the numerousness and

¹See J. P. Boyd, "State and Local Historical Societies in the United States," *The American Historical Review*, XL (Oct., 1934), 10 ff.

variety of the commercial magazine, make it possible, even imperative, to judge the general quarterly by severe standards.

An acquaintance with these quarterlies starts one suspecting a kind of "quarterly mind" as distinct from a "journal," "weekly," or "monthly" mind. Accordingly, it is not surprising in the quarterly field to find Dumas Malone, of the editorial boards of *The American Historical Review* and *The American Scholar*, in the 1937 winter *Yale Review*; to find Henry Smith, of the *South-west Review*, in the *Southern Review*; R. P. Warren, of the *Southern Review*, in the *Virginia Quarterly*; R. P. Blackmur reviewing for both *Southern Review* and *Virginia Quarterly*; Charles Glicksberg with articles in *South Atlantic Quarterly* and *SEWANEE REVIEW*; Kenneth Burke as author in *Southern Review*, as subject in *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

Yet one soon discovers—to add to one's bewilderment—that the "quarterly mind" finally proves to be elusive, non-existing. The winter numbers publish names you are likely to run across almost anywhere: Bonamy Dobrée, John Dewey, Mario Praz, in *Southern Review*; Stark Young, R. P. T. Coffin, in *Virginia Quarterly*; J. W. Krutch, Pearl Buck, Glenn Frank, Peter Monro Jack, in *Yale Review*. Of course, none of the writers mentioned above as appearing in two quarterlies at once confines his activities to the quarterly.

The amount of energy spent on quarterlies, even the "little" ones, is prodigious, often expensive, ambitious, impressively designed. The major quarterlies are packed with competent, thoughtful writing. And, in the midst of it all, a few stories stand out as distinguished and an occasional article as one characterized by something like "creative thinking" in addition to thoughtfulness and judgment. The following stories in the winter numbers seem to me "naturals": E. Godchaux, "The Horn that called Bambine" in *Southern Review*; R. P. Warren, "The Christmas Gift" in *Virginia Quarterly*; Meridel LeSueur, "The Girl" in *Yale Review*, and R. E. Hartley, "Home for Christmas", and the pair of stories called "Parents" by M. G. Clark and W. H. Gerry in *Frontier and Midland*. Kenneth Burke's "Acceptance and Rejection" in *Southern Review* is an exceptional article.

Yet just as one finds a "quarterly mind" and loses it imme-

diately, so one cannot help feeling a sense of waste, perhaps a feeling of emptiness that wealth always gives. The *Southern Review* tends toward an intellectualism reminiscent variously of *The Criterion*, *The Dial*, *The Hound and Horn*, even *The American Review*. The *South Atlantic Quarterly* tends toward an antiquarianism that does not greatly distinguish it on either side from journals of history or from journals of literary history like its colleague at Duke, *American Literature*. But the elements of these and other trends are disparate, and the trends themselves rather vague. One cannot feel that one knows what to expect of the average quarterly beyond expecting nothing very unpleasant.

In short, one does not feel exactly on friendly terms with the editors. In editing, as in writing, distinction is almost synonymous with personality or character. The pleasing dinner companion is one who surprises you and entertains you but who does so only within the logic or consistency of his own temperament. The mere surprier is a bore who wastes himself and you.

The major-general quarterlies are entertaining and stimulating but within no logic of their own. Much of their material is interesting, for example, but also merely innocuous: "Early Letters of E. A. Robinson" or "Missing All" in *Virginia Quarterly*; "Two Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett" or "With Letters from Housman" in *Yale Review*. One might expect the commercial journal to be smooth, innocuous. But, hampered though the editor usually is by editorial boards, one hopes for better, harder things of quarterlies—for births, not still-births. The difference is not between work and play but between work-and-play in or out of character. There is a sense of waste, of want of style among the quarterlies individually and collectively, of going nowhere easily, of having to remember where to look again for the rarer good things lost among the generally ordinary things. The editorial nose is a little like Coleridge's—too small to be a rudder for the face—and the face itself a little like those of Poe's heroines—not so easy to remember as the name.

One is astonished again when one considers the policy of the usual general quarterly on any particular topic or problem (say, Marxist materialism), perhaps because such considerations focus the others. For example, it is easy to associate quarterlies with

regionalism, a matter of considerable moment. Why this association should be easy I do not know. Most of the quarterlies originate outside established centers of publication. Perhaps, after all, the "quarterly mind" is a regional mind if one can define regionalism as a matter of specialty (as, for example, the hod-carrier is provincial in point of view beside the engineer or architect) or of temperament (as the dyspeptic is provincial beside the healthy, or the old maid beside the matron) or of time (as the reporter is provincial beside the philosopher or historian) as well as of place. Or perhaps one associates quarterlies primarily with journals of local historical societies or with the local pride of the Scottish critics of some of the original quarterlies like *Blackwood's*. Or maybe one senses the suburban in the quarterly because it appears rarely. In any case, the association is easy.

It is also *a propos*. Of the major quarterlies, for example, SEWANEE REVIEW, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Southwest Review* and *Virginia Quarterly* belong to the South which also has its share of "little" quarterlies in and out of its colleges (*Bard*, *Better Drama*, *Blue Moon*, *Bozart and Westminster*, *Circle*, *Cycle*, *Lyric*, *Moods*, *Portfolio*, *Shard's*, *Sonnet Sequences*, *Versecraft*, *Vers Libre*), at least one of which, the newly-founded *Pseudopodia*, announces itself forthrightly as regional in policy. The South is the cradle of Agrarianism and has always been somewhat regional (superficially, state vs. nation) in its politics. Its local folk stuffs are varied and identifiable. Members of the staffs of some of these southern quarterlies have made notable contributions to an understanding of the possible influences of regionalism on literature or criticism.² Altogether it is inevitable that quarterlies be somewhat localized in points of view in such distinctive and rather self-conscious regions as The South, New England, The Midwest, The Far West.

Of course the quarterlies almost invariably describe themselves as national or international in scope and appeal—they are as apt as *not* to go to India to see the fakirs there. The *Yale Review* is quite as competent to go "Studying Savages in Melanesia" or begin

²Henry Smith raises some interesting regional questions in his omnibus review of local novels, "Notes on Recent Novels" in *Southern Review*. And his "New Fields for Critics: Standards versus Standardization" is significant in *Higher Education and Society: A Symposium* (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1936).

"On Understanding the English" as to know anything about Connecticut; its best story, "The Girl", is middle-west in setting. But as the SEWANEE REVIEW reveals a kind of nostalgic pride in especially Sewanee spiders, so even the most international of quarterlies comes sometimes down to its own earth, especially in its book-review sections, and might be expected to have a reasoned opinion on its relationships to its own community.

The regional articles or stories fall into classes, more or less functional in origin. The regionalist is doubtless self-conscious to begin with, wondering what to do with his hands, filled either with pride or with shame or scorn for his differences with the rest of the world. Regionalism is his attempt to escape provincialism, and divides into categories according to his manner of escape. The essential quality of regionalism is that the writer does not try to escape from his geographical locale while he is trying to escape from the self-consciousness it has forced on him. His objective is to get on top of his own world and so to achieve a tip-toe-on-a-hill feeling to inject the raw stuff of his art with. The least important types seem best illustrated in the winter quarterlies.

1. The regionalist may simply busy himself uncritically with his surroundings, not minding his hands if they are busy. The dilly-dally regionalist starts queer museums, preserves oddities to confuse the Believers-or-not with, delights in prettinesses. He is a kind of Victorian at heart and fills his parlor with local knick-knacks, lavender and old lace, and antimacassars; closes the window; and hides from the rest of the world. He is the reporter, the photographer.

Hardly any regionalist escapes being of this variety at times. His photos litter the dilly-dalliant study. As they make an album they are especially serviceable of course. And when the regionalist begins to dilly-dally in earnest he informs us greatly if not always needfully. Local-color fiction belongs by nature to this type. Informing his work with sentiment or adorning it with the picturesque, the reportorial regionalist produces art of a sort represented by "The Horn that called Bambine" by Elma Godchaux in *Southern Review* or by the ugly but curious "On Defeated Creek" in *Frontier and Midland*. "The Women on the Battlefield" also belongs to this type in *Southern Review* though it is not always easy

to distinguish examples of it from those of types 2 or 3, the difference often being one of tone. In the *South Atlantic Quarterly* "The Biography of a Slave" is of this type, as is also "Child Wonders in El Dorado", a report concerning prodigious child-actors in the early Far West. This article is in *Frontier and Midland*, where are also the worst examples of the type, specially sectioned: "The Great West: Two Interviews". Especially since the two old ladies interviewed remember nothing of any importance concerning their migration to the west, the space seems wasted. Often one feels that examples of this type are best taken care of by more specialized magazines, notably the quarterlies of historical societies.

2. Or the regionalist may lose his awkwardness by making the most of it. He will be helped by having a sense of humor and, since a critic is provincial beside the *littérateur*, the doctor of men of letters in "Acceptance and Rejection" says pertinently: "Whatever poetry may be, criticism had best be comedy." This kind of regionalist is the vaudeville performer with the extraordinarily big mouth or head or hands, who makes a strength of his weakness and acquires ease as the fat woman in the side-show gets used to being stared at. Chamber of Commerce ads are essays in this variety of regionalism. And with a certain amount of naïveté and amateur antiquarianism, the *Newfoundland Quarterly* specializes in it rather pleasantly.

The general effect of practising this regionalism is to confirm persons in their worst or best suspicions concerning themselves. There is the positive and negative side. One says, Come in, the water is fine. The other says, Stay out, this means you. The Middle West tends toward the positive, New England toward the negative. Such exclusiveness as the negative involves is often creative by stimulating rivalry, so that New Yorkers create their own historical society in opposition to Massachusetts. This kind of regionalism preserves the fakirs of India, and unquestionably they serve: the occidental luxuriant is confirmed in self-assurance by being able to visit the oriental ascetic occasionally; and in order to revalue its worldliness the world needs periodic retirements, as of Hopkins to a monastery or as of Thoreau to Walden.

In its higher reaches this kind of regionalism involves accepting one's surroundings as one's own destiny and, out of them, writing

the comedy or tragedy of one's so-doomed existence. "The Christmas Gift" by R. P. Warren in *Virginia Quarterly* and probably "The Girl" by Meridel LeSueur in *Yale Review* are illustrations of the type in excellent short stories. As they deal with southern books in southern quarterlies or with western books in *Frontier and Midland*, the book sections also illustrate the class, though the individual reviewers may exemplify other types of regionalism. The best tendency of this type is toward the epical, a quality which J. A. Clark argues for in "The Middle West—There it Lies", though he reckons its products will be tragedies. With considerable justice he suggests that present-day Western writers are inane because they acquire no folk-feeling with their surroundings or neighbors and are unwilling, as the epicist and his hero must be, to represent them. The articles of the *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, if sometimes trivially, belong to this type.

3. Or the regionalist may overcome his provincialism by escape from his present surroundings to their past. The past is finished, aristocratic, but not exclusive. It is not local or confining in the same sense that the present is. One can exclude more easily from it than from the present all those existences which make one self-conscious, just as one can include in it the universal or picturesque or other qualities of life which seem appealing.

Probably one should call this type of regionalism "romantic," but the description means little. For undoubtedly, even if only an idea or ideal, the past may seem realer and be more essential than the present. The plantation culture of the South is an instance, as Stark Young adroitly suggests in discussing Simms in "More Encaustics for Southerners", in the *Virginia Quarterly*. The escape to the past is cultural, and feeds hungers which the present, however it is faced, never can feed: it is significant that Minnesota established an historical society within two months of the meeting of its first territorial legislature, so creating the oldest institution in that state! The artist can shape or control the past more easily than the present—the more passed, the easier! In it are to be found, presumably, at least the originals of such principles or practices as one's own time needs to re-valuate.

The danger of cultivating this variety of regionalism seems to be not "romantic escape". Rather, it is the same danger that

faces the vaudevillian regionalist. For it is so much easier to "select" from the past than from the present that one is apt to select only one's own images there, becoming more and more self-made and arrogant. One risks setting oneself up as the idol of one's own cave, the Narcissus of one's pool, a Ben Gunn on Treasure Island alone, so long as to grow inarticulate in self-communion. Winifred Welles's nostalgic reminiscences of New England in the story "Lessons" from *Yale Review* illustrates the type as do several articles listed elsewhere and "The *Cato* and the *Nautilus*, Maryland Privateers" in *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

4. Or, reacting against the self and its community, the regionalist may set about reforming them. This variety of regionalist risks being ridden out of town on a rail and, except in an unimportant sub-species, is not very well represented in the quarterlies. Often he deserves such treatment. He also risks defeat, and often ends his regionalism by leaving town on rails for New York or Chicago or some other more urbane vicinity than his own. In "The West—There it Lies" Mr. Clark charges that western writers leave town only too readily.

As he is a traditionalist, accepting standards for reform only as others have made them elsewhere in time or space, uncritically, this regionalist tends to be reactionary and to fossilize home-cultures in their stone-age patterns: he has no sympathies with the vaudevillian but perhaps too ready sympathizes with the romantic regionalist. He is apt to be a faddist, and he is apt, accordingly, to condemn Twain for not being Melville if he is from the West or, especially, to condemn Masters for not being Eliot or Shelley. If by his own labor he bears himself to his own philosophy and thereby to his own standards, he becomes that better kind of regionalist to be noted below.

Though it attempts to reform only a concept and a concept having to do only with the past, "The Yeomanry of Dixie" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* represents the type, suggesting that the rank-and-file should be given more, the Old South scions less, credit for the achievements of the Confederacy on the field. In the same magazine, though primarily only informative, "The Dispensary Movement in North Carolina" is basically of this type. The nostalgic qualities of such stories as "Lessons" or such leanings-back toward

the aristocratic Old South as Stark Young reminds one of in "More Encaustics"—these are phases of this kind of regionalism. And it is only a step from Type 1 and "Christmas Gift" through this type to the philosophical Type 6, below.

5. Or the regionalist may escape a sense of provincialism by universalizing his little world, turning micro into macro-cosmos. One excuse for all varieties of regionalism is that, even when the writer does not, the reader may accomplish such an idealization. In "The Midwest—There it Lies", Mr. Clark recommends that the region become a symbol or illustration of larger realities, as in Yeats—that it serve, so to speak, as the vices of one's time in which merely to dress naked idealities or as the green apples to prove or illustrate, inductively or deductively, the sourness of unripe fruit. This regionalist loses himself in such democratic universalities as the man of the soil with the hoe, the man against the sky, the human race until, for instance, the midwestern pioneer in Neihardt joins the everlasting company of Ulysses or Aeneas as an "Eternal Wayfarer".

The universalizing regionalist is competent to universalize the past as well as the present and to give a kind of universal validity even to the essential differences of his community from all others. So, Whitman was equally insistent that he was a man (universal) and an American (provincial). And the leaf of grass growing on the steppes, presumably, is as essential to grasshood as the leaf growing on American plains, because it is the same with difference. As Mr. Smith has pointed out, these validated differences may be used for the critical evaluation of standards and standardizations, of course to the embarrassment of the traditionalist. I have been unable to see a copy of the winter *Southwest Review*, but at least some members of its staff are obviously competent to write or value work in this genre.

6. Or the regionalist may escape a sense of provincialism by way of philosophy which may or may not have anything to do originally with his surroundings but which may serve nevertheless to order them, forming, informing, even reforming them. It seems to me significant that, though an occasional writer may fashionably light-finger Marxism and though of course the Agrarians have access to several of the quarterlies, this type is actually

not illustrated in the winter numbers. Either reactionary or radical philosophies may produce it. And the absence of the type from the quarterlies seems to me curious because the type is traditional, à la mode. The melodramatic landlord or mortgage-holder with the black whiskers who turns poor Nell and her family out into the snow needs only to represent the capitalist or laborer, materialist or idealist, to transform a "local color" melodrama into a philosophically regional story. Many of the original local colorists accomplished this reformation themselves.

As a matter of fact, in "The Midwest—There it Lies", Mr. Clark does discuss the type more or less directly. He suggests that western writers need some sort of philosophical certainty to ground themselves on in their localities.

There is doubtless also (7) an art-for-art's-sake escape from provincialism which could be called regional. But it is a complicated type which does not seem altogether separable in function from Type 1. R. P. Blackmur verges on it in discussing "Composition in Nine Poets" in *Southern Review*. Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (both much referred to in "T. S. Eliot and Dante" in *Southern Review*) are suspect of it, as was the late Henry James. All persons meet co-equally in the realm of the classic or of pure form. Of course this regionalist tends to be traditionalist and to lose his locale in imposing formalities upon it.

The most valuable regional work will doubtless represent several types of regionalism at once, notably 4, 5, and 6. It will probably seem epical, at least outside the fields of pure history or pure literary history. The epic hero is no mere romance lover or fighter with whose individual fate one is concerned. Instead, he has superhuman aspects because he represents his people so that their fate is his fate and because he is the instrument of some destiny bigger than himself or his neighbors, like Chance variously in Hardy or Conrad, Dreiser or Masters, his fate being therefore also the workings-out of a philosophy. The writer, of course, must have anticipated his epic hero in comprehending both his people and his philosophy. And Mr. Clark's advice to mid-western authors is therefore pointed at all regional writers.

Meanwhile, the most interesting essay on regionalism in the winter quarterlies comes under the heading of none of the cate-

gories but has bearings upon all. In "More Encaustics", Stark Young seems to suggest that the connection between region and writer is inescapable: the pure artist is a freak or monster. Moreover, as the Old South exists mainly in the mind as an idea but is and was none the less influential, so the regional influence may always be both real and ideal, just as the writer himself probably has a real and an ideal identity. The important thing is, not that a writer should be affected by his region, but that his region affect him in a productive manner. The ideal and real ego should be stimulated to laughter or tears by the real or ideal environment so that it grows. It makes little difference whether the ideal environment exists outside the mind or not; it may still serve, as illustrious superstitions, doubtful knowledges, and generous errors could serve Shelley to order his life or as loyalty to even a doomed America might serve Masters and his creature Merivale in *Domesday Book*.

In other words, the important matter is that the self be neither stifled nor inflated in its own worst, home-grown egoism. Environment, real or ideal, should not produce only a self-idealized Mrs. N—, knowing what she likes, or only an equally ingrown, self-frightened Mr. S—, knowing what he believes and prejudiced against anything not immediately measurable by such standards as money or other sensible realities. Real or ideal, instead, environment should produce persons like the "little aunt", who is ultimately creative and who asks the one thing of art that it can give, a heightening or deepening of life.

Even so, we may feel a certain condescension for the regionalist, knowing that he is likely to appear from suburban, self-conscious peripheries, where persons are apt to feel imposed-upon, starved or cheated, decadent or new, rather than from such urban centers as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, London, or Paris. Yet it may be that the ultimate provincials are in those very urban communities because they have there lost the motive of self-questioning, self-realization, or growth. To overcome his sense of provincialism, the regionalist has to get upon his feet and move and carry his neighbors along with him. The provincial is probably only the ostrich with his head in the sand, at any rate,

if he gets up on his feet and, leaving his neighbors behind, moves to New York, London, or Paris.

Whatever the fate of the provincial may be, it does not appear that any of the major quarterlies is characterized or planned consistently to make the most of regional problems or materials. Just as it seems in one breath or article to argue for a tragedy of the west and in another to argue for a comedy of the universe, in fact, the *Southern Review* has the appearance on the basis of regionalism of arguing in an article and a review for traditionalism, and in another review arguing for its opposite—for diversitarianism or change. Among the quarterlies, however, the *Southern Review* does not therefore appear to be exceptional. This fact, again, is bewildering.

by Marion Canby

WEIRD SUBLIMATION

So at last death has hunted that old she-fox to earth!
We shall not see her any more,
Pettily suspicious,
Constantly cautious,
Eyes slanted, swift-trotting hither and yon
On small and secret greeds . . .
Curious that *she* should find rebirth
In lifting grass and freely running weeds,
That she should put on
Garments of green to dance the grave-yard floor,
Rushing like a sun-wild wave
On her own rough, loveless grave!—
Passing that way, thank God we need not know
It is her withered flesh the winds so flashingly blow!